

DAVID CASSIDY

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The doctor had told him he was suffering from gall bladder trouble. Gallstones had formed and were causing the intense pain.

The news was no real surprise to David. For he had been suffering from gall bladder pains since the age of 14—something highly unusual for so young a person.

But only in the past few weeks had the pain been so intense. Had he waited too long to do something about it?

Two weeks ago, after his first major attack, the doctor had told David that he would have to have an operation. But since it would take him weeks to recover, David elected to wait until January, when filming on his ABC-TV series, *The Partridge Family*, would be over for the season.

After all, he had so much going for him now. Not only was the series a hit, he also had to record songs frequently, not only for the show but for release as records. One of these records, *I Think I Love You*, had been the best-selling single of 1970, with over three-and-a-half million in sales.

This in turn had led to a series of successful concerts, and David's weekends were frequently taken up with flying all over the country for concert dates, often two in a weekend.

Someone with gall bladder trouble should not eat in the haphazard way that David had been eating lately. But there was so much to do, and so little time to do it, that something had to suffer. And too often it was David's diet.

Gradually the pain from his gall bladder, which had been relatively mild in the past, began to increase. Fellow cast members and visitors to the set of *The Partridge Family* sometimes commented on the fact that David could be cheerful and joking one minute, and then suddenly take on a moody, faraway look. When they learned later of the pains he had been suffering for years, this sudden change in mood seemed more understandable.

But he had not talked much about the pains until the first bad attack. And then, knowing that he would soon have to have a gall bladder operation, not only was he willing to talk about it . . . he also wanted to know everything he could about such operations.

On July 4th of this year, a few days after that first seizure, David attended a party at co-star Dave Madden's home in Malibu with his date, cute little Judy Strangis of *Room 222*. In talking to the other guests, he learned that one man had also suffered from gallstones and been forced to have his gall bladder removed.

David questioned the man anxiously, trying to find out as much as he could about the operation. What he heard was not too pleasant. Nor was the sight of the man's operation scar, which he was allowed to see. Although the operation had taken place three years earlier, the scar was still red and vivid. It was a frightening sight, and David dreaded having this operation.

Then came the second bad attack—so bad it made him wonder if he was going to die. As he woke up and screamed in terror, the silence beyond the scream said: "I don't want to die!"

And he knew—he really knew—that perhaps he *might* die.

Again he screamed.

By now, his roommate was at his side, eager to help. They had been in New Jersey together over the weekend for yet another concert. They had gotten home Sunday afternoon. And now it was three o'clock Monday morning. David was due at the studio in a few hours to work on

The Partridge Family. But just as he had been unable to report to work the day after his last attack, he knew that he would be absent from the studio again.

With Sam helping him, David called his mother, actress Evelyn Ward, and then they called the doctor. Once more he hurried over to ease David's pain.

But David couldn't sleep again that night. Nor would the doctor permit any more delays. Along with David's mother, who had arrived from her home in Brentwood, he insisted that David go to Mt. Sinai Hospital for tests.

That afternoon, July 12, David checked into Mt. Sinai and the tests began.

At 5:45 P.M. that same day, David's doctor entered the hospital room and informed David and his mother that it would be necessary to remove David's gall bladder the very next morning. For infection had already set in, and there was no time for delay.

David's response was odd, almost funny. Although he had seen a gall bladder operation scar only a week before, when the doctor told him that his own gall bladder would have to be removed, his reply was a question: "Where is it?" Perhaps he was trying to make a joke to relieve the tension of this serious moment. Or perhaps his mind had succeeded in blotting out the memory of that ugly scar. . . .

Jack Cassidy and Shirley Jones had been kept informed, of course. David wanted them to know everything. And Shirley, who is really closer to David than his father is, had made a gracious gesture. She offered the use of her home for David's recovery, which was likely to be a long one. Gratefully, David declined the offer, for his own home was ample. But inwardly he blessed Shirley for her kindness. She was much more to him than a stepmother, more than a co-star. She was his friend and trusted confidante, someone to whom he could talk more easily than to his father, for she was gentler and more understanding, although he loved his father dearly.

■ On the day of David's operation, a strange and very touching scene took place in a waiting room outside the operating room at Mt. Sinai Hospital. Two women, who by nature could have been rivals, comforted each other as they waited for word of the success or failure of David Cassidy's operation.

Shirley Jones—still young and beautiful in appearance in her mid-thirties, her blonde hair curling softly about her picture-doll face with its large blue eyes. The woman who had married Jack Cassidy in 1956, almost immediately after his divorce from the other woman in the room, Evelyn Ward. Evelyn, a bit older, but beautiful in her own exotic way, her darker hair and slightly slanted eyes showing her to be David's mother.

Two women who loved the same man—one of whom loves him still and bears his name. Two women brought together now at last by their love for someone else—Evelyn's son, Shirley's stepson, the famous but now unconscious and utterly helpless David Cassidy. Only the surgeon's skill could help him now. That, and prayer.

So while the doctor operated, these two women prayed, united at last in a comradeship that transcended the problems of the past, their thoughts only of David. If a transient and painful memory of an old divorce intruded at all, it was quickly swept aside in their mutual concern for David's recovery.

But if one woman suffered more, it was Evelyn. For Shirley had her husband and three handsome sons, but Evelyn had only David. After her divorce from David's

father, she had worked her way up as actress and singer until she was starring on Broadway as Gwen Verdon's replacement in *New Girl in Town*. But she gave it all up to be a full-time mother to David. A later marriage in California, to director Elliot Silverstein, also ended in divorce. So David was her whole life now, and she couldn't bear to lose him.

Finally the doctor came in. The operation was over, and it had been a success. Although David was under intensive care at the moment, he would be all right.

Shirley and Evelyn looked at each other, their expressions a sudden mixture of smiles and tears, and in that look were friendship and warmth and the comradeship of a shared emotional experience. For they had come together to give what help they could in a crisis, to pray together, and to hope together. And now the crisis had passed, and suddenly they knew that they could never think of each other in quite the same way again. For the first time, they were friends, and very special friends at that, however much or little they might see of each other in the future. David in his pain and suffering had brought them together, and something very good had come out of a near tragedy.

For a near tragedy it surely was. After the operation, the doctor said of David's case, "He could have had peritonitis. It could have gone quickly into peritonitis and death. . . ."

Even after the operation, there was much misery still to come for David Cassidy. For days he would lie in his hospital room with two tubes inserted in his body, one in his nose and the other at his side, in acute discomfort from the tubes and from the large incision left by the operation. At least a week's stay in the hospital was necessary, to be followed by perhaps a month's recovery at home, with a nurse and a cook required for his care and the special diet he would now need. No fried foods, no cream were to be on that diet, for the power of his body to absorb and digest fats had been severely curtailed by the removal of his gall bladder. In fact, for the rest of his life he would probably have to be careful about what he ate, even after the nurse and the cook were no longer required.

Teen-age girls besieged the hospital with phone calls, and some of them were anxious to see their idol. But for the first few days, not even his roommate or his other close friends could visit him. Only Evelyn, Shirley and Jack were permitted to call. Shirley brought Shaun, her oldest son, to the hospital several days after the operation, and they had to run a gauntlet of fans, many of them eager to press notes and gifts on Shirley for delivery to David. A guard had to be posted at David's door to shield him from overly-eager admirers who might have hampered his recovery.

Several concerts had to be cancelled, for David would not have the strength for them for at least two months. And the *Partridge Family* had to take its August hiatus in July, several weeks early. But that time would be made up eventually, when David returned.

The important thing was that David was alive. In nearly dying, he had brought together the two women who meant most to him, his mother and stepmother. And now, in living, perhaps he will be able to improve relations between his divorced parents as well. For he knows with a new clarity that life is too short, too tenuous and too precious for past griefs to steal time from the present.

It is a lesson that David has learned relatively early in life. But the price he paid was nearly too high.

—by Robert Winton